Finch’s Landing – Williams Plantation: To reach the fictional Finch’s Landing, travel north of Monroeville on Highway 41. At County Road 17, turn left, and follow 17 to the fork in the road leading to the Alabama River Museum and Haines Island Park. (Approximately 5 miles on County Road 17—bear left on Finchburg Road, then take a left on Lock & Dam Road.) Follow past the old Williams Store, recognizable by its white facade and red roof on the right, until you see white fencing on your left. At the top of the incline is the old Williams Home, at what was once a river landing known as Finchburg. This is the family home of Harper Lee’s grandmother, Ellen Williams. This was once part of a self-supporting plantation. To see Isaac Creek Park on the Alabama River, continue for another .4 miles on Lock and Dam Road.

Finch’s Landing, p. 91
“Finch’s Landing consisted of three hundred and sixty-six steps down a high bluff and ending in a jetty. Farther downstream, beyond the bluff, were traces of an old cotton landing, where Finch Negroes had loaded bales and produce, unloaded blocks of ice, flour and sugar, farm equipment, and feminine apparel. A two rut road ran from the riverside and vanished among dark trees. At the end of the road was a two-storied white house with porches circling it upstairs and downstairs.”

The Maycomb Tribune Office, p. 171
“Mr. Underwood not only ran The Maycomb Tribune office, he lived in it. That is above it. He covered the courthouse and jailhouse news simply by looking out his upstairs window. The office building was on the northwest corner of the square, and to reach it we had to pass the jail.”

Walk Monroeville, Edition V
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Maycomb, Alabama

Harper Lee’s Fictional Small-town World

I would like to leave some record of the kind of life that existed in a very small world. I hope to do this in several novels to chronicle something that seems to be very quickly going down the drain. This is small-town middle-class southern life as opposed to the Gothic, as opposed to Tobacco Road, as opposed to plantation life.

As you know, the South is still made up of thousands of tiny towns. There is a very definite social pattern to these towns that fascinates me. I think it is a rich social pattern. I would simply like to put down all I know about this because I believe that there is something universal in this little world, something decent to be said for it, and something to lament in its passing.

Harper Lee, in 1964 interview with Roy Newquist

Many writers do not have a singular objective for their writing—they simply follow their characters and plots as they develop. Nelle Harper Lee, however, told Roy Newquist in 1964, that her “objectives are very limited.” Since her two published novels had been written at the time of the interview (completed in the late 1950s and published in 1960 and 2015), she was speaking about what she had done to achieve these objectives: she had created the fictional Maycomb, Alabama, based on her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama.

Vivid descriptions in To Kill a Mockingbird lead readers down Maycomb’s treelined streets as Scout, Jem, and Dill pass hot summer afternoons playing games and enacting stories until adults call them home for supper at dusk. In Go Set a Watchman, Jean Louise walks these same streets when she returns to her hometown for a visit twenty years later, in the summer of 1956. Certainly the town has grown and changed in the intervening twenty years, but the setting is still recognizable as Jean Louise once again walks from the Finch home to the courthouse square.

For the story in the two different decades, Lee describes the town realistically, with its weaknesses and strengths. Residents struggle with poverty, unemployment, racism, and social classes in Maycomb, but it remains a small town where “Neighbors bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between... Street lights winked down the street all the way to town” (as Scout reflects after she has walked Arthur “Boo” Radley home).

Visitors to Monroeville, Alabama, can still identify many of the sites that inspired the creation of the fictional Maycomb. They can sit in the balcony of the old courthouse and relive a key scene in To Kill a Mockingbird and a pivotal scene 20 years later in Go Set a Watchman. They can experience a hot summer day such as the one Scout describes when “People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything.”

The thousands of visitors who come to Monroeville each year can recognize the origins of the fictional Maycomb because Harper Lee has captured “something universal in this little world...” and achieved the goal she revealed to Roy Newquist:

... all I want to be is the Jane Austen of South Alabama.

Nancy Grisham Anderson
Distinguished Outreach Fellow
Auburn University at Montgomery

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Walk Monroeville! “Seeing Maycomb, Through The Author’s Eyes

Monroeville, is an iconic destination, evoking images of deep south, rural Alabama.

Monroeville is known for its connections with Pulitzer Prize winning author Nelle Harper Lee and her childhood companion, Truman Capote. Lee’s “To Kill A Mockingbird” has become the town’s anchor which draws upwards of 30,000 visitors annually more than Monroe County’s population. Visitors liken Monroeville to Andy Griffith’s Mayberry, perhaps because the town and its residents are overwhelmingly friendly and welcoming to visitors. In July of 2015 the publication of Lee’s Go Set a Watchman brought renewed attention to Monroeville and the fictional Maycomb.

Annually, in April and May, The Mockingbird Players stage a production of the Christopher Sergel play, “To Kill A Mockingbird.” This production has achieved worldwide acclaim. Its unique setting for Act I, in the Odha Lee Biggs Amphitheater on the west side of Monroeville’s 1903 courthouse, complete with antique car, a mail dog, a mule named Stormy and a shotgun wielding sheriff is noteworthy to both international and domestic tourists. Act II may be even better—taking place in the second floor setting of Monroeville’s 1903 courthouse courtroom where the trial scene of Atticus Finch, attorney, defending Tom Robinson, a black man wrongly accused of raping a white female, dramatically comes to life and where a jury of twelve white men (summoned from the audience) are selected to decide Tom’s fate. At the close of the 2-1/2 hour production there is a standing ovation and the audience clamors up to the cast to solicit personal autographs on play programs. This is the ultimate Monroeville Experience but there is so much more!

This Walking Tour will have two major focuses: (1) What are the real Monroeville places tied to Lee’s novels, Go Set A Watchman and To Kill A Mockingbird? (2) What is here today, incorporating the history of some of the homes and structures around the courthouse square? Lee’s “To Kill A Mockingbird” and “Go Set A Watchman” are a works of fiction set in the town of Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930’s and 1950’s. How does it compare with Monroeville?

In this Walking Tour, we will explore a history of homes and commercial properties located in Monroeville’s Downtown Historic District (recognized by the National Park Service in September, 2009).

1 The Old Monroe County Courthouse, 31 North Alabama Avenue, Home of Monroe County Heritage Museum: The original Federal Land Grant of 80 acres, 3 of which were to be designated as a public square, was issued to Monroe County Probate Judge Henry Taylor on July 11, 1831. This was the original Monroeville, named for James Monroe, who served as Secretary of State from 1811-1817, and who was elected President in 1817, serving two consecutive terms. Monroeville’s population in 1830 was 450; in 1900 the official census counted 422. The towns of Burnt Corn on the Old Federal Road eastward and Claiborne, the Alabama River Port to the west were both still thriving and more heavily populated, by comparison. In 1832, the county citizens voted to move the county seat from Claiborne to Monroeville.

At least five different courthouses have been erected on the downtown square:

(1) A log structure combining the courthouse and county jail, built in 1832. It burned the following year, destroying most county records. Few county records exist from 1815 when Monroe County was declared a part of the Mississippi Territory) until after the fire in 1833. (2) a two-story frame building constructed by Wingate Rumblebly and believed to have been erected on the southwest section circa 1840. It burned in 1849 but this time the county records were saved. (3) The first brick courthouse was built in 1852; it was used as a

Mel’s Dairy Dream, 216 South Alabama Ave.: Mel’s Dairy Dream, in the heart of Monroeville’s historic downtown, is the quintessential old-fashioned drive-in restaurant. Its notoriety stems not only from its menu of mouth-watering burgers and shakes and 1950’s era façade, but from its location on the site of the Lee house (that is “Lee” as in Nelle Harper Lee, who penned the Pulitzer Prize winning To Kill A Mockingbird). Visitors flock to this site in search of Lee and of some tangible evidence of her fictional Maycomb. Its location, next door to the site of the Faulk house (once home of Truman Capote’s cousins, the Faulk’s, with whom he resided when visiting Monroeville) is nostalgic when one considers that Truman and Nelle, kindred spirits, hammer ed out short stories in their treehouse behind the Lee house. The Lee house was torn down in 1993 and Mel’s was subsequently built. The Faulk house burned to the ground in 1940, and a second house was erected on this site; the second house was torn down in 1958. All that is left of the original Faulk house is a rock wall and the indentation for a goldfish pond, along with plantings of camellias, oaks and magnolias. However, visitors to the area often order to-go burgers and fries from Mel’s and stroll over to the adjacent Faulk property to read the historic marker dedicated to Truman Capote, and to soak up the atmosphere that so inspired two of the south’s most renowned writers.

According to Rebecca Hardee Brunson, in her book, Hardee’s Dairy Dream, A. C. Lee was seventy-two years old when he moved with daughter Alice Finch Lee to the house on West Avenue. The original Lee home was purchased by Frances and Ruth Hardee and was torn down within two months of the purchase. Prior to selling the home, the Lee family had been devastated by the death of Frances Finch Lee, on June 2, 1951, and Edwin Coleman Lee on July 12, 1952.

The Hardee’s built Hardee’s Dairy Dream, which opened in 1953. They sold out to Claude Garrett, who operated it as Garrett’s. Randy McDonald, a local insurance executive, bought the business some twenty-plus years ago, and has since operated it as Mel’s Dairy Dream.

Mel’s is technically a fast-food restaurant. There are picnic tables for outdoor seating. All food is prepared to order, and ordered “to go”. Milkshakes are “real” shakes, made with an old fashioned machine such as one used to see at a soda fountain. Sweet tea and soft drinks are also available. The burgers, fries and hot dogs are likely to come wrapped in wax paper and placed in brown paper bags. Visitors enjoy ordering their food to go from Mel’s and strolling up to the downtown square where they may picnic at one of the tables on the courthouse lawn.

Mel’s is a trip back in time, a reminder of how things once were. As such, it is likely to endure and prosper. It is most visited for its connection with Harper Lee and her family.
The 1852 building burned in 1928. The only remnants of this courthouse are two iron columns, mounted on the north wall of the museum’s exhibit room, and a brick walkway at the home of Nicholas Stallworth Hare. (4) The Old Monroe County Courthouse, built in 1903, served as county seat for sixty years, and presently houses the Monroe County Heritage Museum. (5) The present courthouse was dedicated in 1963.

The Old Monroe County Courthouse was built in 1903 under the leadership of Monroe County Probate Judge Nicholas Stallworth. The architect was Andrew Bryan, a prominent Southern municipal architect. The contractor was M. T. Lewman from Louisville, Kentucky, who was contracted to build the courthouse for $29,000. The actual building cost was considerably more, due to the fact that the cost of the foundation and the basement were not included in the original cost estimate. It is widely said that cost overruns on the old courthouse defeated Judge Stallworth in his subsequent run for re-election.

Many of the materials used in the construction of the courthouse were shipped in by rail, including manufactured heart pine flooring and rolled tin for the ceiling of the upstairs courtroom, which is stamped in a dogwood pattern. The courthouse dome is made of sheet metal, which has at various times been painted silver or white. The courthouse clock strikes on the hour, and is frequently mentioned in the earlier works of Truman Capote.

The two story brick building on the west side of the courthouse is the original county jail, built in 1854. It was replaced in 1859 with what is commonly known as “the old jail”. The original county jail is in the left, rear of the building which today houses the Stallworth Law Office. Both the 1852 courthouse and the old jails were constructed of brick made from local red-clay deposits and believed to have been formed by slave labor. The brick were irregular in size and relatively soft due to inferior locally built brick kilns. Both jails are still standing and are the only known ante-bellum structures in Monroeville.
“A Celebration of Reading” by Branko Medenica: “A Celebration of Reading” is a bronze sculpture which was commissioned in 2010 by the Monroeville/Monroe County Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Alabama Tourism Department. Its purpose is to offer “some tangible evidence of Monroeville as Alabama’s Literary Capital” and to establish a permanent presence on Monroeville’s courthouse square. The project provides an opportunity to inspire those who experience it with a love of reading. It is a way for Monroeville to further the goal of raising awareness of the benefits of reading and the lingering life lessons of the message brought to a reader by a good book.

The Birmingham, Alabama sculptor, Branko Medenica, was selected to execute the commission. His sculpture depicts three children centered around a bench, reading a book. The piece is designed such that visitors may place themselves within the setting for photographs with the courthouse’s distinctive dome in the background.

As Branko sees this, “The challenge with this project has been to capture that special quality of timelessness that is so prevalent when studying certain literary works, which transcend language and cultural barriers. This sculpture could be anywhere, and it would speak to those who see it as a celebration of childhood innocence and a celebration of reading. The fact that it is in Monroeville, Alabama’s Literary Capital, should speak volumes.”

The sculpture was dedicated on April 17, 2014 in a ceremony held in the Otha Lee Biggs Amphitheater, followed by an official unveiling of the piece. Under terms of the contract with the artist, Branko Medenica, the Monroeville/Monroe County Chamber of Commerce holds the copyright for the piece.

From Roy Newquist Interview with author Nelle Harper Lee: …We didn’t have much money. Nobody had any money. We didn’t have toys, nothing was done for us, so the result was that we lived in our imagination most of the time. We devised things; we were readers, and we would transfer everything we had seen on the printed page to the backyard in the form of high drama.

Monroe County Bank Building, Corner North Mount Pleasant and West Claiborne: The Monroe County Bank was founded in Monroeville on February 11, 1904. Its first office was in the 1852 courthouse, which was vacated due to the establishment of the 1903 courthouse next door. J. B. Barnett, Sr. was the first President of the Monroe County Bank, which was the first bank in Monroe County. He arrived in Monroeville in 1901 and opened his law office. According to local historian George Thomas Jones, there was a huge need for a local bank in Monroeville. The economy was almost solely dependent on farming, and it was almost impossible for the local farmers to obtain affordable loans. J. B. Barnett raised $8,000 from local businessmen toward the $15,000 minimum required to establish a bank, then raised the additional $7,000 from out of town investors.

In 1909 the bank moved into its new two-story brick building on the southwest corner of the town square. Originally, the bank occupied only the building on the corner. It was later expanded to include the building next to it, which had been Hixon’s Store. To reach the second floor of the original corner building, there was a door on the southwest corner of the building which opened to a stairwell that went straight up to the large director’s room. The front area on the second floor was residential, being occupied by Dr. Ida A. Fraser, a chiropractor who had both her residence and office there. A stair on the north side of the Hixon building gave access to a lawyer’s office. Harper Lee’s father, A. C. Lee, had his law office in this building, as did his daughter Alice, first upstairs, then downstairs. Harper Lee wrote portions of her novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, in her father’s law office in this building. In 1923, the second bank founded in Monroeville, the Bank of Monroeville, merged with the Monroe County Bank. Harper Lee’s father, A. C. Lee, was Vice President of the Bank of Monroeville.

In 1972, the Monroe County Bank moved from its location on the downtown square to a new office on Hines Street. In 2004, the Monroe County Bank merged with Bank Trust, and in 2012 it was acquired by Trustmark National Bank.

Atticus’s office, p. 171
“Atticus’s office was in the courthouse when he began his law practice, but after several years if he moved to quieter quarters in the Maycomb Bank building. When we rounded the corner of the square, we saw the car parked in front of the bank…”

When we rounded the corner of the square, we saw the car parked in front of the bank. . . .”

His office was reached by a long hallway. Looking down the hall we should have seen Atticus Finch, Attorney-at-Law in small sober letters agains the light from behind the door. . . .”
Monroeville Elementary School: There has been a school on this site since as early as 1871, according to George Thomas Jones, Monroeville historian. The first school was called the Monroe Male and Female Institute, and it was a private school. In October, 1895, students at the school moved into a new, larger building on this site. In January, 1903, the frame building was destroyed by fire. Following this, the city became involved in public education, and sold bonds to finance the first brick building on this site. The city operated the elementary school as a public school; at this point, the high school, which was private, shared space in the same building as the public elementary school.

This arrangement continued from 1905 until the opening of the school year in 1911. (In 1907, the Alabama Legislature passed an act that required every county to provide a public high school.) The public high school had to be on a five-acre plot, and a new building of at least $5,000 in value was required. It took four years for Monroeville to meet these requirements. Bonds were sold to finance the new high school building, which was to be on 7-1/2 acres about fifty yards south of the combined elementary/high school. Classes were first held in the new high school building in 1912-13 school year. When the public high school opened, the private high school closed.

In 1936, a new high school was erected on York Street (the present Monroeville Middle School). The elementary school moved into parts of the old high school, which burned on November 11, 1946.

The present school was built on this site in 1947 according to records in the Monroe County Revenue Commission Office. Over the years several additions have been added to the footprint of the original building.
named the Otha Lee Biggs Amphitheater, in honor of retired Judge of Probate Otha Lee Biggs, without whose leadership there would be no play. In the entire twenty-seven years of the local production there are very few performances not visited by Judge Biggs. He is usually found discreetly watching behind a camellia bush, or up in the balcony in the old courthouse courtroom.

The cast for the play is a special group of people from all walks of life. The cast is a family and most of them have been together for several years, some in the same roles. They are volunteers, serving together for the love of the play. The play has traveled to several venues, most recently to Hong Kong’s ASIA Society Center. Consider that two blocks south of the Monroe County Courthouse is where Harper Lee lived growing up. Her dad, A. C. Lee, practiced law in the old courthouse courtroom. She watched him argue cases from her seat in the balcony. She attended Monroeville Elementary School, three blocks south of the old courthouse, and graduated from Monroe County High School, to the west of the Old Courthouse. There are reminders of Nelle Harper Lee and her family throughout Monroeville. She left her mark, but gave the town its best gift by characterizing it in her novels.
The United States Post Office, 104 North Alabama Avenue:

On this site was originally the Yarbrough House/Hotel built in 1833. It was the oldest building of any kind on the square when it was demolished in 1937 to make way for the present post office.

The Monroeville Post Office was built in 1937 under President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, one of well over one thousand such post offices built during this period. These post offices, built during the Great Depression, were meant to demonstrate the importance of the American people to their federal government. The inclusion of original art in many of these structures was part of the Treasury Relief Art Project, 1935 – 1938, which provided artistic decoration for existing Federal buildings, and which produced a number of post office murals. TRAP was established with funds from the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

In the Monroeville post office, a mural entitled “Harvesting” occupies the south interior wall. The subject is a farmer using a three-mule team to pull a threshing machine across a wheat field. This is a Midwestern, not a southern, scene. The artist is Arthur L. Bairnsfather, and the painting is dated 1939. He was commissioned to paint this mural when he won an open competition conducted by the Treasury Section on Painting and Sculpture under contract to the WPA, for which he was paid $680. The Harvesting mural is one of the surviving works of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal Art Program. The mural was restored in 1985 by John Bertalan, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, who specializes in art restoration.

To Kill A Mockingbird, The Post Office, p. 170

“We went by Mrs. Dubose’s house standing empty and shuttered, her camellias grown up in weeds and Johnson grass. There were eight more houses to the post office corner.”

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church of Monroeville:

From Permelia S. (Pat) Lazenby’s “History”:

The first Methodist Church in the vicinity of the present town of Monroeville was built in 1821. It was a primitive style log structure, one mile west of the present town square. At the time, Monroeville was known as Walker’s Mill, named for a Mr. Walker who had built a store, grist mill and tavern. In 1832, the county seat, then at Claiborne, was moved to Walker’s Mill, which for a short time became known as Centerville. The town was officially named Monroeville later in 1832.

In Monroeville, now the county seat, a lot was reserved in the town’s plan for a Methodist church and cemetery. In 1835 a bare-boned, frame structure was erected. Inside there was a center aisle and two tiers of seats. One tier was reserved for women, the other for men. This building served the congregation for 45 years. It was later enhanced with a steeple and bell, glass windows, and paint.

The church continued to grow and in 1916 a new location for the church was secured at the corner of Alabama Avenue and Claiborne Street, on the site of the present day Lee Motor Company. The Building Committee Chair was J. B. Barnett. According to Mrs. Pat Lazenby’s history, “A handsome brick structure was erected with beautiful stained-glass windows as lovely memorials.”

On January 2, 1929, the church was devastated by a fire that had originated in a neighboring building. “The only things saved from the consuming flames were the pews, the pulpit appointments, and the memorial windows.”

The church secured a new location on Pineville Road, its present day site. The same building committee worked to erect a new church building. The congregation worshiped in the Old Courthouse Building on downtown square while the new building was being erected. On Sunday, August 2, 1931, the first service was conducted in the new building. The steeple was placed on the building in 1931, which is the same year that the church began construction of its parsonage. An educational building and chapel were added in 1963. Furnishings for the chapel were given by Nelle Lee in memory of her parents and brother. Wesley Hall, the church’s newest wing, was dedicated in 1999.

The Radley Place, P. 9: GSAW

“The Radley Place jutted into a sharp curve beyond our house. Walking south, one faced its porch; the sidewalk turned and ran beside the lot. The house was low, was once white with a deep front porch and green shutters, but had long ago darkened to the color of the slate-gray yard around it. Rain-rotted shingles drooped over the eaves of the veranda; oak trees kept the sun away. The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard—a “swept” yard that was never swept—where Johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco grew in abundance.”

To Kill A Mockingbird, The Post Office, p. 170

“We went by Mrs. Dubose’s house standing empty and shuttered, her camellias grown up in weeds and Johnson grass. There were eight more houses to the post office corner.”

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church

First United Methodist Church
The Wee Diner

The Wee Diner was located on Pineville Road across from the La Salle Hotel & Motel (the present-day site of Monroe County Public Library). It was a popular dining place, and it is where Gregory Peck frequently dined with Harper Lee when he visited Monroeville in the 1960’s in preparation for his role as Atticus Finch in the film, “To Kill A Mockingbird.” The Wee Diner was owned by Frank Meigs. It opened in 1956. According to Bunny Hines, former Monroe County Librarian, when Peck and wife Veronique stayed at the La Salle, Meigs would send breakfast over to them every morning.

Faulk Millinery/Morgan Furniture Building/North Alabama Avenue: The original building on this site was owned by V. H. and C. E. Faulk. It was a two-story frame building. The first floor housed Jeff Smith’s Barber Shop on its left corner, the Faulk Millinery Store in the center, and a dental office on the right corner. The second floor was residential. (Miss Jennie Faulk, the milliner, was Truman Capote’s cousin and the business owner). Upon the deaths of the Faulk sisters, this building was demolished and the present brick building was erected by J. T. and Hammond Morgan. The building served as the offices and showroom for locally owned Morgan Furniture Company until the early 1990’s, when Gladys Morgan sold the property to Monroe County Tax Collector Charlie Deer. The property today is in the ownership of Deer’s family, and is available for rental.

Pineville Road Cemetery: Pineville Road Cemetery is actually a combination of three cemeteries that have been developed over a period originating in 1846, according to George Thomas Jones, Monroeville historian.

The oldest of these cemeteries is the Baptist Cemetery. In 1846, the Baptists built a church on the site of the present day cemetery, and the cemetery backed up to the church. The Baptist Church was on this site until 1922, when it moved to a handsome brick building on the north side of the downtown square, demolished in 1970. In the 1970’s, the Baptist’s built the present day church across Pineville Road from the site of the original Baptist Church, Monroeville.

The Methodist Cemetery is actually on the west side of downtown square, at Sumter and West Claiborne Street, which was the location of the church built in Monroeville (1835 – 1916). The Pineville Road Cemetery also includes Hillcrest Cemetery, which was established by John B. Barnett, Jr. in the 1950’s. A third cemetery was developed by Farish Manning. The oldest of these cemeteries is actually the Methodist Cemetery, off West Claiborne Street, followed by the Baptist Cemetery, which was established with the church, in 1846.

Barnett House – From Page 12

The house was damaged in Hurricane Ivan (2004), and a new roof was installed. In 2010, Preston hired Jimmy Hicks, a local contractor, and began the arduous process of a restoration, which lasted well into two and one half years. The goal was to preserve and reuse as much of the original floors and materials in the house as possible. A family room, laundry room, bathroom and modern closet were added. The main portion of the house was not altered. The kitchen was gutted and a modern kitchen added.

There have been seven children born in this house. Anna Lee and Gus had three children, Evelyn, William and Norman. Preston and his brother, Chester were both born in the house, and the bed where they were delivered by Dr. Rayford A. Smith, Sr., of Monroeville is still in the house. Preston’s mother was in labor for forty hours in an upstairs bedroom of the house in August, when he was born. Preston’s father relates that, Preston was not breathing when he was born, and Dr. Smith tried all the usual methods of getting the baby to breathe. When none of these worked, he placed a piece of gauze over the baby’s mouth and breathed in several times, and the baby finally uttered his first cry. When asked why he had worked so hard, Dr. Smith stated that he could not give up on this baby – there were too many people praying in that room!

Louise Lee, the second oldest sister of Alice and Nelle, was also born in this house. The Lee’s lived there for five years before building their own home on Alabama Avenue. Anne Barnett Zimmerman was also born in the house, and delivered by Dr. R. A. Smith, Sr. The history of this home is beautifully intertwined with a history of many of the families that established the town of Monroeville, and who worked to see it prosper.

Preston and his wife plan to spend several months a year enjoying this multi-generational family home. When they are not in Monroeville, they are living in Atlanta.
Gus Baker/Norman/Preston Barnett

House: This home was built in 1910 by Preston Barnett’s grandfather, Gus Baker Barnett, for his grandmother, Anna Lee Moore Barnett. His grandmother was from Wetumpka, and the couple met when his grandfather went to work for his cousin, Mike Jenkins, who later founded Jenkins Brick Company in Montgomery. Gus was hired to be an engineer on the L & N Railroad out of Birmingham.

The property was originally purchased from Judge Stallworth, father of Mrs. Mary S. Hare, Judge Stallworth and Gus Barnett agreed there would be a common driveway, which is still the case today.

The house has two bedrooms on the main floor and four bedrooms upstairs. Two of the upstairs bedrooms were converted to kitchen and sitting rooms. Several families leased the upstairs rooms at one time or another, such as Harper Lee’s parents, and Mrs. O. B. Finklea, who came to the house with her son Charles and two daughters. She lived in Monroeville so her children could attend school, and the family arrived with their own milk cow.

In the late 1970’s, Preston Barnett bought the house from Norman Barnett and turned it into two apartments.

Gus was a firm believer in building things to last. He oversaw the building of the house placing rocks in the ground before building the brick columns to support the house. As a result of this attention to detail, the house does not creak and groan and has not settled over the 100 years of its existence. This same attention to detail can be seen in his construction of the brick building on the square, which housed the Barnett & Jackson Hardware business.

Gus also personally built five of the mantelpieces in the house, which are in the living room, dining room, master bedroom, and two of the upstairs bedrooms.

The center hall of the house is one third the width of the house both upstairs and downstairs. These wide halls provided ventilation, as did the twelve foot ceilings. In the big hall upstairs, brackets were installed so a curtain could be hung and part of the hall could be partitioned off as a guest room.

All of the windows in the house were rebuilt during the 2010 restoration, approximately half of the windows are original mouth blown glass, also known as “float glass”. The remainder, which required replacement are mouth blown glass that was purchased from Germany and were made by the same process as the old glass.

Anna Lee Moore died in 1972. One of her younger sisters, Dot Moore Sowell, married Monroeville native, Marcus Sowell and moved to Monroeville. Marcus Sowell was a lawyer and they lived on West Claiborne Street. Her best friend was Mary Stallworth, wife of Francis Williams Hare, a prominent Monroeville attorney and Spanish war veteran. In the house today there are two landscape paintings that originally were painted by Dot, when she was still living in Wetumpka.

In the late 1970’s, Preston Barnett bought the house from Norman Barnett and turned it into two apartments.
"Walk Monroeville II"

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9. Monroe County Public Library
10. Hybart/Hendrix/Lewis/Brewton Home
11. Stalworth/Hare House
12. Barnett House
13. Pineville Cemetery
14. First United Methodist Church
15. City Hall of Monroeville
16. Lee Motor Company
17. Lyle Salter Park
18. Truman Capote Historic Marker
19. Monroeville Elementary School
20. J. C. Hudson House
21. Finklea/Tate House
22. Maxwell/Sawyer/Barnett House
23. Chambers/Barnett/Lazenby/Jeffcoat House
24. E. T. Millsap/Nicholas/Countryman House
25. Mims/Wohlers House
26. Coxwell House
27. Monroe County Bank Building
28. Old Jail/R.S.V.P.
29. Original Jail, Leston Stalworth Law Office
30. FRS Timber Building
31. Mel’s Dairy Dream
32. Monroe County High School
33. Finch’s Landing